

Minutes - King County Rural Forest Commission Meeting
Thursday, July 11, 2013, Preston Community Center

Commissioners present: Dick Ryon, North Bend resident; Doug McClelland, Washington DNR; Sandy Miller, forest landowner; Brandy Reed, King Conservation District; Bernie McKinney, forest landowner; Daryl Harper, forest landowner; Nate Veranth, forest landowner; Rex Thompson, forester; Julie Stangell, Hancock Timber; Matt Rourke, American Forest Management (not present during TDR); Cindy Spiry, Snoqualmie Tribe

Staff: Darren Greve, Water & Land Resources Division (WLRD); Kristi McClelland, WLRD; Bill Loeber, WLRD; Randy Sandin, Dept. of Permitting and Environmental Review; and Linda Vane, Commission Liaison

Guests: Mike Brathovde, Ravensdale resident

Vice Chair Dick Ryon called the meeting to order at 9:40 a.m.

Comprehensive Plan TDR Policy

Darren Greve, King County Transfer of Development Rights Program Manager

Darren Greve provided a history of the Transfer of Development Rights Program in King County, from its beginnings as a pilot project in the 1990s, to its adoption into code in 2000, and to the present time. The purpose of the program is to move development potential out of rural farms and forested lands, and into the urban area. He said that that generally King County Code does not allow transfers of development rights from Rural-zoned to Rural-zoned properties except in a few very narrow circumstances such as 2.5-acre properties near urban areas. There is no provision in Code that allows Rural to Resource-zoned (Agriculture, Forest, and Mining) transfers at this time, he said. An extensive discussion of the implications of Rural-to-Rural transfers of development rights ensued. Commissioners had questions for Darren about the workings of the TDR Bank, whether Critical Areas are eligible for TDR, TDR and public land, traffic concurrency, and the impact of TDR on the investment potential of land. Ron commented that increase in small lot property values could be an unintended consequence of TDR in areas of 2.5-acre zoning where the development pressure is high.

Brandy proposed a broader discussion on the various incentive programs that create a tapestry of services for rural landowners at a future meeting. She said that these incentives could help landowners invest in forest health.

At the conclusion of the discussion, the commission made the following recommendations:

- The commission encouraged the County to make residents more aware of the TDR program and its potential.
- The commission recommended that the County prepare informational material that would help landowners understand the long-term implications of transferring development

rights from their properties. Of concern were questions related to estate planning, taxes, and the balance of financial vs. non-monetary values of resource lands in perpetuity.

King Conservation District/ King County Task Force and Conservation Panel process

Dick Ryon, RFC Vice Chair and Brandy Reed, King Conservation District

Brandy Reed provided background information about the Task Force and Conservation Panel process, which was convened in May 2013 by the King Conservation District (KCD) and King County for the purpose of developing recommendations for future KCD programs and services.

Dick Ryon, who represents the Commission on the Task Force, reported on the progress of the Task Force and requested input. He presented two documents developed by the Task Force. First was a "DRAFT Inventory of Currently Available Natural Resource Services," a selective list of conservation programs currently offered in King County by variety of agencies and non-profit organizations. The second was a "List of Unmet Program or Service Needs," a list of services identified by individual Task Force members as being insufficient or absent in the region. Dick asked that Commission for input on which "unmet needs" they believed would be most important for King County as a region and which might best be provided by KCD.

Implementation of King County Strategic Plan: Actions to support rural economic development and maintain rural character through forestry

Kristi McClelland, King County Forester

Kristi McClelland reported on the Forestry Program's work to help forest landowners offset the costs of stewarding their forest properties by thinning and selling timber or developing non-timber forest products. The project has employed multiple approaches such as technical assistance, education, and connection to cost share programs to stimulate local forest product markets. The program has also linked forest landowners with silvicultural service providers and consulting foresters. Staff have helped implement the "Snoqualmie Strategy" by advancing rural economic, environmental, and community strength by promoting local grown local used and through collaboration and coordination of efforts, according to Kristi.

Developing the next generation of foresters is part of the effort, said Kristi. For example, County staff worked with the Green River Community College Technical Advisory Committee toward establishment of four-year forestry degree program, she explained. In addition, two Snoqualmie Tribe members have been selected for forestry internships and the County has been working with the Tribe to develop a forest/natural resources program, she said.

Kristi provided an overview of the efforts to have the Built Green program put locally grown and milled wood on an equal footing with third-party certified wood products. She explained that Built Green is a certification program for residential construction, much like the LEED program for commercial construction. She explained that the County's Forestry Program and Green Tools Program are working on a proposal that would make local wood products eligible for the same number of points that third-party certified wood products receive. Local wood already receives points, but the proposal would refine the criteria and increase the number of possible points,

according to Kristi. She said that this would help local wood products to benefit more from Built Green marketing.

King County Backcountry Trails System: Subcommittee Report Out

Rex Thompson, Rural Forest Commissioner

Rex reported that the Backcountry Trails System Subcommittee (Doug McClelland, Julie Stangell, Daryl Harper, Nate Veranth, and he) had identified two issues for consideration by the Commission. These were:

1. Unauthorized trails on rural and Resource lands: there is a question as to how best to deal with unauthorized use and how to engage user groups.
2. Permitting: if the permitting process is cumbersome or expensive it is possible that user groups would simply build trails without a permit or permission from the landowner. What could be done to avoid such situations?

Rex opened a discussion on how the Commission or the County might move ahead with landowners and trail users to try to get a handle on the problem of unauthorized trails. He pointed out that there are many points of view among trail users. Some would be willing to work toward a legislative approach. Others would be inclined to continue as before, building and using backcountry trails without informing the owners of the land, he said.

The commissioners discussed the ways that high costs for permits and complex permitting processes create barriers for landowners who might otherwise seek permits for soft surface, recreational trails on their land. Rex suggested that US Forest Service trail standards be used as a model for setting a threshold for whether a permit is required or not. This would only pertain to narrow recreation trails that would not cross bodies of water or critical areas, said Rex.

Randy Sandin explained some of the factors that would have to be taken into consideration to establish a threshold for exemption from trail construction permits. Examples included potential NPDES permit nexus, the Critical Areas Ordinance, and determining if an exemption could work with the existing Code definitions and standards. Randy said that these types of issues could generally be dealt with in one of two ways:

1. Create a permit with a given set of standards.
2. Write exemptions so that trails that meet a certain standard do not need a permit.

A discussion of various approaches to addressing the complexity and cost of recreational trail permits ensued. Randy said that he would research relevant definitions in current Code, determine what limitations might be in place, and report back to the Commission regarding the potential for a trail permit exemption.

Agency and staff reports and announcements

RFC Administration – Linda Vane reminded Commission members to complete the online Public Records Act training if they have not already done so.

Shoreline Master Program – Randy Sandin distributed a letter from the Department of Permitting and Environmental Review that explained changes in County Code that could affect forest practices in shoreline areas.

Public Comment

There was no public comment.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:40 p.m.

Next meeting

The next meeting will be held on September 12, 2013, at the Preston Community Center.

Staff Liaison: Linda Vane, at 206-296-8042 or linda.vane@kingcounty.gov